

Suppressed and Oppressed? Edited Life Histories of Australian Female Academics 1965–1985



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While the experiences of women in higher education have received attention from scholars there is a need for gender to be understood in local and time-bound contexts. For example, to what extent do the lives of female academics in non-elite institutions reflect the careers of those in more prestigious establishments? This article uses edited life histories of a group of women academics who worked at one of Australia's oldest colleges of advanced education during the period 1965–1985 to examine the extent to which their careers reflected the position of women academics generally. The article raises the issue whether gender was the key issue in the experience of academic life for this group of female academics or was rurality and institutional type more important in explaining their academic lives.

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Introduction

Friedman argues that in writing university histories there is a need to make women visible as they have frequently been ignored in this genre.¹ In order 'to seek insight, a more fine-grained focus than a university or faculty' is important because there may be very different disciplinary patterns of acceptance and resistance towards women at various periods and in different institutions.² The history of women's quest for academic careers highlights many issues including the quest to be considered equal, issues of discrimination and the place of gender in shaping university cultures and practices.³

Gender, like other analytic categories, 'must be appreciated in local, time-bound contexts'.⁴ Gender need not necessarily play a major role in all episodes in university history but gender needs to 'always be a part of historical sensibilities'.⁵ This is because 'institutional cultures that may appear to be "natural" and "normal" from an insider's perspective can

assume a very different character once gender considerations inform questions and analyses'.⁶

MacKinnon⁷ observes that while no overall history of women in Australian universities exists some historians of education have given attention to issues around women's higher education.⁸ On the whole, this work is an exception and in most published university histories women remain marginal.⁹ MacKinnon discusses how she decided to approach women and the university through a series of micro histories.¹⁰ *College Academics*, a study of a non-elite Australian college of advanced education by the current writer, was informed by Samuel's stress on the 'the lived experience of ordinary people of the past ... the ordinary and the everyday'.¹¹ The study noted that academics, especially those who inhabit the less prestigious institutions and disciplines are like the ordinary people who have been ignored in favour of the rich and powerful.

Reviewers of *College Academics* such as Stortz noted that the issue of gender did not received specific mention in the discussion.¹² This article arises from the comments of Friedman, MacKinnon and Stortz. As such it constitutes an attempt to redress the lack of attention to the issue of gender in *College Academics*. In so doing it adds to the literature on women in higher education in non-elite institutions. The article is also a response to the claim by Cass, Dawson, Temple, Wills and Winkler that academic women form a particular occupational group whose traits should be described and analysed.¹³ The focus of the article is on aspects of the edited life histories of a small group of Australian female academics who worked at one of the country's oldest and smallest colleges of advanced education during the period 1965–1985. To what extent did their careers reflect gender disparities in higher education that other studies of the time noted?

Methodology

Edited life history

This article uses the edited life history approach. It is important to distinguish between the life story and the life history.¹⁴ The 'life story is the story we tell about our life'.¹⁵ The life history is a collaborative venture and reviews a wider range of evidence.¹⁶ The life storyteller and another portray this wider account by interviews, discussions and by scrutiny of texts and contexts.¹⁷ The life history is the life story located within its historical context and embraces contextual or intercontextual analysis.¹⁸

Denzin¹⁹ and Allport²⁰ differentiate between comprehensive life history and the topical life history. The topical life history is concerned with only

one phase or aspect of the individual's life. This may be edited with comments and analysis by the researcher, either interspersed with the narrative or in combination. It can include introductory passages and analytic comment after the narrative, or incorporated in a combined form. All forms contain three central elements: the person's own story of his or her life; the social and cultural situation to which the subject and others see the subject responding; and the sequence of past experiences and situations in the subjects life.²¹ This article uses that form of life history, which is 'edited', a decision made in the light of Allport's advice that while uniqueness of expression should remain unedited, editing for the sake of clarity or to remove repetitious material is justified and even essential.²²

The distinctive usefulness of the life history approach is in the depth of its historical perspective, the internal analytical connections that it reveals and the access it provides to the respondent's words.²³ Life histories allow for examination of the influence of contextual factors such as home life, parents, schoolteachers and wider issues such as social class, religion and the social, political and economic climate.²⁴

Interviewing

Interviewing was the primary research method used. It was 'seen as the sole alternative to doing nothing'²⁵ and 'shed light on elusive problems such as how decisions are reached, how influence is exerted and the reasons certain events took place'.²⁶

Two types of interviews were used; the non-scheduled standardized interview and the non-standardized interview. Fifty-three academic staff from the Bendigo College of Advanced Education were selected by stratified random sample, with proportional representation based upon departmental size. This was half the number of full time tenured staff at the College in 1985. Of these, five academic staff members were females. Four were lecturers. The other was a principal lecturer and head of department. The lecturers came from education, ceramics, computing and accounting and the principal lecturer from computing.

Ethics

Middlebrook, recalling her own troubles when writing biography, notes that 'it seems that not much by way of ethical conduct is expected of biographers anyway'.²⁷ However, the conduct of the research reported here raised important ethical issues.²⁸

The ethical dilemmas faced were very similar to those of Chrisman who was aware of the advantages of studying the members of her own group.²⁹

Like those in her research, while unfettered access to academics in this research was easily gained, this had to be balanced against obligations to protect their rights to privacy.

Thus the research data was collected and made available in ways that would not offend or harm the interviewees or cause them personal anguish.³⁰ Interviewees were told of the nature of the research and what it entailed and they all understood that each non-scheduled standardized interview would be tape-recorded, transcribed and possibly be quoted verbatim. They were also informed that interview transcripts would also be used together with other measures such as document analysis in the writing of the final report. The academic staff involved were also informed that while anonymity (and here pseudonyms are used for the female academics in the article) and confidentiality would be guaranteed, it might still be possible for others to 'guess' accurately the real identity of individuals. Interviewees were informed about the purposes of the research and how the information would be used.

Contextual Features

To understand fully the responses of those interviewed it is necessary to appreciate the socio-economic climate in which they worked. The article now outlines the influence of the economic climate, what social science research from the time tells us about the wider context of these female academics' life histories and finally sketches in the institutional context of where these female academic staff were employed.

The economy

The general economic climate determines whether higher education is in a period of growth, stasis or contraction.³¹ In the economic boom years of the 1960s, higher education expanded, jobs in academe were plentiful and there were excellent prospects of early advancement and promotion.³² This period of Australian higher education has been referred to as the Golden Age of Higher Education.³³ With the worldwide economic recession of the 1970s and the lack of growth in the 1980s, the situation was reversed.

Ray Over notes the unprecedented growth in the Australian university system in the 1960s and early 1970s.³⁴ The number of universities increased from 9 in 1956 to 19 by 1976 and enrolments climbed from 34,406 in 1956 to 153,456 in 1977.³⁵ Full-time academic staff grew from 2,295 in 1956 to 13,204 in 1976.³⁶ Enrolments continued to rise, by 6 per cent in total between 1976 and 1980 but there was only a 3 per cent increase in staffing, and staff numbers actually decreased by 1 per cent between

1978 and 1980.³⁷ Thus the demand for academic staff dropped at precisely the time when more women than previously became qualified for university appointments.³⁸

The position of female academics

In the United States and the United Kingdom women academics were concentrated mainly in the humanities and almost absent from applied sciences.³⁹ A minority of females were to be found in all subject areas. In both countries women published less than men and in America taught more than men.⁴⁰ The subject choices of women academics went back to secondary schools and were linked to differential socialisation.⁴¹ However crude and subtle forms of discrimination also affected women academics.⁴² The assumption that educational expansion is associated with a reduction in inequalities of educational opportunity did not hold for females in British universities in the period 1963–1980.⁴³ Relatively few women achieved promotion above the lecturer level.⁴⁴

The gender bias that existed in university staffing during the 1960s and 1970s was especially intriguing because in many countries there was a marked improvement in female access to primary, secondary and higher education in this same period.⁴⁵ Sutherland examined the case of 244 women who were appointed to Chairs in Finland, France, East Germany, West Germany and Great Britain.⁴⁶ She found that women comprised a small minority at professorial level, varying between 2 and 3 per cent in Britain and 6 per cent in France. Sutherland noted that social and practical factors combined to influence the university woman teacher-researcher's career.⁴⁷ She noted that in all the countries that she studied universities offered a more tolerant and liberal environment for women than industry or commerce but most university women had memories of a male dominated university even if individually they had experienced friendship, acceptance and assistance from male academics.⁴⁸

Ray Over studied the early career paths of 436 males and 162 females who commenced as lecturers in British universities in English, modern languages and psychology in the period 1971–1973.⁴⁹ Ten years after their initial appointment 80 per cent of the males and 61 per cent of the females held a full-time post in a British university and 8 per cent of women, compared to 18 per cent of men, had risen to the level of senior lecturer, reader or professor.

While few British women achieved university positions the reason may have been due to the fact that few of them undertook postgraduate degrees.⁵⁰ British female academics outnumbered men by three and four to one in the lower academic positions and numbered very few in the higher posts.⁵¹ For example, in 1979 women received 37 per cent

of all initial degrees and 23 per cent of higher degrees awarded by British universities.⁵² In the same period women accounted for 14 per cent of full-time academic posts, with only 1 in 40 females being a professor, 1 in 16 being a senior lecturer or reader, and 1 in 7 being a lecturer.⁵³

Ray Over examined staffing in Australia education departments during the period 1965–1975, noting that it was one of the largest disciplinary groupings with a growth rate far greater than that found in other disciplines.⁵⁴ He found that there were clearly more males appointed than females and women were mainly at the lecturer level.⁵⁵ However, he suggests that the sex ratio of staff in education departments needed to be compared to the sex ratio of graduates in education. Over discovered that in the period 1960–1973 females were awarded 21 per cent of MEd and 19 per cent of PhD degrees in education in Australian universities.⁵⁶ He suggested that the sex ratio of academics in education departments in 1980 was consistent with these figures.⁵⁷

Over and Lancaster looked at the career development of male and female academics who commenced as lecturers in Australian universities in behavioural sciences, education, humanities and social sciences in 1962–1964 and 1975–1976.⁵⁸ They noted that proportionately more males than females gained early promotion. In the 1962–64 cohort 68 per cent of males became senior lecturers within seven years of their appointment. The comparable figure for females was 30 per cent.⁵⁹ Over and Lancaster also noted that multivariate analysis showed that even allowing for research output and level and place of qualification, the chances of promotion varied according to gender. However, they concluded that though there were gender differences in career development, it was difficult to isolate precisely the specific processes by which women were disadvantaged.⁶⁰ Over suggested that while the limited representation of females in university posts was consistent with discrimination, numerical inequality did not necessarily constitute proof of discrimination.⁶¹

Over and Lancaster⁶² and Over and McKenzie⁶³ both noted the gender disparities that existed in the staffing of Australian universities. For example, the number of female academics in Australian universities was below the level of representation of females as students. In 1978, for instance, females gained 25 per cent of all higher degrees from Australian universities but in the same year they held only 16 per cent of full-time teaching posts in Australian universities.⁶⁴ In addition women numbered 1 in 60 professors, 1 in 25 readers, and 1 in 6 lecturers.⁶⁵ There was no female Vice Chancellor.

Cass and her co-researchers thought that because of the barriers female academics had to overcome starting an academic career for them

was a major achievement.⁶⁶ They studied 430 female academics in New South Wales from Sydney, New South Wales and Macquarie Universities and the New South Wales Institute of Technology, and noted that:

- they were atypical in terms of their socio-economic background
- their parents were more highly educated
- their fathers were in mainly high-status occupations
- few were educated in state schools
- they were usually born into small families and were often the only or oldest of two children
- they were from families where they were encouraged to proceed with their education for a professional career
- many had mothers who were influential role models who encouraged them to pursue careers
- they were motivated chiefly by intellectual interests, and secondly, by careers whereas the situation was reversed for males
- they went into arts-based faculties more than science ones as opposed to men for whom the situation was reversed
- it took them longer to complete their higher degrees, often because of child rearing
- they were less likely to have higher degrees but those in permanent posts were just as well qualified as their male colleagues
- they published no less than their male colleagues when matched for rank
- they were less likely to be married or to have children
- if married their husband's careers normally took precedence especially if there were children
- they viewed universities as institutions which discriminated against women at appointment and when promotions were made
- their aspirations for promotion were lower than their male colleagues and they were less optimistic.⁶⁷

Cass and her co-researchers believed that the crucial role of 'the structure of the academic career' as a barrier to the advancement of women in academe needed to be stressed.⁶⁸ They noted that it was a structure based on the assumption that male academics did not take time off for childbearing and childrearing and that wives served largely as domestic support systems.⁶⁹

Bendigo College of Advanced Education

In 1926, the Victorian Education Department established the Bendigo Teachers' College to supplement the supply of trained teachers from Melbourne Teachers' College. These teachers were generally destined for rural schools. It was the first State Teachers' College in Australia

established in a provincial centre. On 31 July 1973, the College ceased to be under the direct control of the Victorian Education Department and became a constituent college of the State College of Victoria, renamed the State College of Victoria, Bendigo.

In July 1976, following a state government directive, the State College of Victoria, Bendigo merged with Bendigo Institute of Technology to form the Bendigo College of Advanced Education. The Martin Report of 1965 had especially recommended that Colleges of Advanced Education be established in regional provincial areas, including Bendigo.

The Bendigo Institute of Technology had a long history going back to its precursor institution, the Bendigo School of Mines and Industries that opened on the goldfields of Bendigo in 1873. Originally, it offered subjects relating to mining, including chemistry, geology and metallurgy with the aim of providing instruction in areas useful to those engaged in mining. Within fifty years the emphasis in the School had changed from 'education for miners', to a complete range of educational offerings at certificate and diploma level covering metallurgy, chemistry, mining, engineering, natural science, art and pharmacy. The Commonwealth Government's Martin Report of 1965 recommended that Australia's technical college system be upgraded and its offerings expanded to provide tertiary education in the humanities, the biological, physical and social sciences. Consequently, in 1965, the character of the Bendigo School of Mines changed when it became affiliated to the Victorian Institute of Colleges. Henceforth, it was known as the Bendigo Institute of Technology. From this time, the range of courses offered was extended and diversified.

Silverback noted that the Bendigo Institute Of Technology 'in spite of its tertiary nature, to many people still remain [ed] "the Tech"' because many people continued to associate its previous technical function with the more recently introduced tertiary level studies even though they were discrete areas.⁷⁰

It is of interest to this research that the College in Bendigo had a female Vice Principal for the years 1970-1980 and for most of decade the majority of students, especially in teacher education, were female. In addition a government report in the mid-1980s found that the College had one of the worst cases of gender biased staffing in an Australian college of advanced education. It had not only the lowest number of female academic staff but also a much lower number of tenured and senior ranked female academic staff than any other college of advanced education in Australia.

Edited Life Histories

The following female academics' life histories focus on their fortuitous entry into an academic career, issues associated with entry into that career and aspects of academic working life in a college of 'ordinary' status.

Margaret

Margaret was invited to lecture in ceramics at Bendigo College in 1971. Before that she had taught at Caulfield Technical School although she did not have any formal teaching qualifications. While at Caulfield her ceramic work came to the attention of an international ceramicist whose student-apprentice she subsequently became. He repaid her bursary of \$4,500 to the Victorian Education Department and, in return, she ran his studio for him during the period 1969-1970. However, she had to put his name on any artwork she completed.

Being in charge of the studio proved to be an important learning experience as it was an international meeting place for artists, ceramicists, sculptors and painters who visited because of its reputation. Eventually her employer suggested it would be advantageous for her to establishing her own studio because of her independent nature and the goals she desired. He cautioned her that if she pursued a teaching career it would hinder her work as an artist but suggested that if she struck a balance between teaching and ceramic work she would be able to establish herself as an artist as well as a teacher.

Upon arrival in Bendigo, and with the assistance of friends, Margaret built a studio and started her own gallery. It was at this time that she was approached by the staff member in charge of ceramics at Bendigo College and asked if she would teach ceramics there. After considering the proposal she accepted because she would be able to have some say in the development of the course. Initially the teaching involved two and a half days plus some night classes per week.

Two years later the head of department asked her to consider becoming a full time staff member. At this time there was a vacancy for an artist-craftsperson to lecture in the College and she was encouraged to apply although there was a large number of applicants.

Margaret was attracted to the position because it involved teaching ceramics. She was a specialist in the ceramics field and especially favoured the practical aspects of making ceramics. Margaret viewed Bendigo at that period as essentially an industrial town, which was not very outspoken about art or concerned with the artists that lived in the City. She noted that people questioned whether it was possible to 'make a living from being an artist or a ceramicist?' She believed that she established

her reputation as an artist and teacher by her own exhibitions and through the quality of her students' work.

Margaret also noted the difficulty of returning to Bendigo College after being a student and lecturing students not much older than her self. Aged twenty-four years she was one of the youngest staff members at the College. Being a college lecturer also differed greatly from being in charge of a commercial art studio.

Clara

Clara's entry upon an academic career had some similarities with that of Margaret. She commenced lecturing at Bendigo Teachers' College when requested to give some guest lectures while still a primary school teacher in Bendigo. Request is really too mild a word. Given the nature of State Departments of Education at the time it was a request that she could not refuse as it constituted a formal directive. Two years later she was directed to commence work at the College by the District Inspector of Schools. Clara noted how her entry into academic life was not what she had planned:

It was a matter of being directed, not my own choice. I never thought of becoming a lecturer when I was a student at Teachers' College. My whole idea was to remain as a teacher and, in particular, to be in charge of a school, not just teach in it but to administer it by becoming a principal.

Clara had no say in becoming either a guest lecturer or a permanent member staff member at the Bendigo Teachers' College. She was instructed to leave her class to take guest lectures because they were short of staff at the College. When Clara commenced full-time employment at Bendigo Teachers' College it was the result of a phone call at the school where she was teaching. She informed the Department of Education that she was most reluctant to leave her primary class however, she was firmly told that she did not have a choice and was required to work at Bendigo Teachers' College. The Department stated in no uncertain terms to her that the College's need was greater than that of her school. She could be readily replaced in the school while the College could not function without someone with her expertise. Clara noted, 'I supposed I was conned in that respect'.

Clara noted that the attraction for the Victorian Department of Education of moving her to the Teachers' College was that she had outstanding teaching marks from her District Inspector of Schools. These were a prerequisite for a position in a Teachers' College. Bendigo College wanted her on staff as she was a specialist primary teacher. She was trained

in both primary and infants teaching with specialist certificates in both areas. Bendigo College needed someone with infant teacher qualifications as they had been unsuccessful in filling a staff vacancy. Another attraction for the College was that she had supervised student teachers in her primary classroom. Having established close relationship with student teachers was critically important when she commenced lecturing at the College because College students had requested the appointment of an experienced and approachable teacher. Being young herself she appreciated the students' viewpoint and empathised with them.

Clara believed that working at the College had made her 'more of a fighter for survival than I would have been in a school'. She became concerned to try and increase her formal qualifications. She had wanted to do likewise while she was primary school teaching but she was discouraged from so doing by her Principal who stated she did not need more qualifications, as she was already qualified 'to go to the top'.

When she commenced work at Bendigo Teachers' College there were two people who had a marked effect on her work. One was a male member of staff. They had both been appointed at approximately the same time and became mutually supportive. Importantly Clara believed that he gave her confidence to lecture to groups of students. He also encouraged her to take charge of her career and to take a leading role in the courses that taught. The other influential person was a female member of staff that she modelled herself on. This staff member taught her how to show concern for students without being excessively friendly.

Clara had many disappointments in her career. She believed that being a woman made her career at Bendigo Teachers' College difficult, as she was never considered competent to undertake many important roles. She noted for example, that at the time of the merger of the two Bendigo Colleges she was not considered sufficiently strong-willed for committee and negotiating work. She was never:

given the opportunity to have a go, to show whether I could or couldn't. It was just thought straight off that I wouldn't be able to do it and a man would always be put in. At no time was I given an opportunity to get experience on a committee.

Clara thought that because of long her career at the College and her well know identity she was seen as a 'dog's body and I think that's the disadvantage'. She traced her treatment to the manner of her initial appointment to Bendigo Teachers' College. She noted that 'if I could have come in as a person, as an individual and in my own right perhaps I would have been seen differently but with coming through the back door as I did, it had no advantages'.

Merrill

Merrill noted that her entry into an academic career at Bendigo College was 'a long story'. Initially she was employed part-time in a Bendigo accountancy firm and also at the Bendigo Technical College library. Her husband's ill health necessitated that she seek a more promising career. Her career search coincided with Bendigo Technical College advertising for a typing teacher and Merrill successfully applied for the position.

In her first week at Bendigo Technical College she taught twenty-eight hours of classes across a range of subjects including law and accountancy. When her husband's health did not improve she recommenced studying in order to improve her career prospects. Twelve months later she was offered permanent employment at what was to become the Bendigo College of Advanced Education but was then the Bendigo Technical College. Merrill observed of her entry into the academic profession:

I more or less fell into it I suppose. I did not have much in the way of formal qualifications. I had done a senior secretarial certificate and some accountancy and worked for a chartered accountant for 4 years so I decided I had better do some more study. I did not even finish till 1976. I just kept going. I had no intention of ever been a teacher, none whatsoever.

Merrill was employed at Bendigo Technical College in 1964 because of her work experience and because of her willingness to teach a wide range of subjects. At her interview the College wanted to know what she had studied at Hull College of Commerce in Britain. The interview panel commented to her 'well we really need someone not to just teach typing for four or five hours a week but to teach introduction to law and accounting and farm book keeping and things like that'. Merrill utilized her previous work experience in accountancy. Furthermore having become proficient in public speaking and public relations in her previous career she found herself drawing on those experiences in her academic career. Working as an academic at Bendigo College changed her as she became much more self-assured and self-assertive.

During her academic career at Bendigo Merrill was especially influenced by a number of influential colleagues. The first of these was the Head of the School of Business who actively encouraged her to pursue her career. The Deputy Director and Director of the College, provided similar support and especially encouraged Merrill to undertake higher degree study. The latter commented to her 'you have the experience and you can teach but you are going to need higher qualifications'. Merrill's Masters degree supervisor was also very influential. He was a Fellow in Business Administration at Melbourne University and President

of the Australian Computer Society. Merrill found it hard to identify precisely the source of his influence but noted 'he was a true professional. I was inclined to burst into things and do things spontaneously. Now I think about it before I do it and I think it is something I have learned from him'.

When Merrill commenced her academic career staff certainly didn't have much professional freedom, as academic life was very demanding. It was a 9 am to 6 pm job and on Thursday she taught from 8 am till 10 pm. Academic life was very hectic. There was very little time to do much apart from take classes. The majority of preparation and correction was done after work at home. In Merrill's words academic life 'did not have a lot of gloss about it'. She noted that it amused her, when she sat on interview panels in the 1980s as Head of Department, to have people say in interviews that they wanted a position at the College in Bendigo because 'oh well it is semi-retirement after all'.

Merrill had no major disappointments in her career. She was troubled when students left College because of financial difficulties and believed that her concern was due to her over involvement with them. However, overall she had been very happy. She noted that she had been listed in *Who's Who of Australian Women* partly because she was the first person to be awarded the Victorian Institute of Colleges' Masters Degree in Business. However, she wondered if being so listed was as much of an honour.

Ruth

Upon completion of her first degree Ruth was bonded to the Victorian Department of Education. Accordingly she taught for some time in Victorian secondary schools before moving to Papua New Guinea to teach. Prior to her employment at Bendigo College Ruth again taught in Victoria where she became extremely dissatisfied with the school and its administration. Consequently her desperate search for another job resulted in her successful application for a one-year contract lecturing position in accounting at Bendigo College.

Ruth was unsure if her employment had caused any major changes at Bendigo College. She thought any alterations she had effected may have been very superficial but perhaps other staff had become more accustomed to having a female as a member of staff. She recalled that 'the head of department remembered to say ladies and gentlemen—eventually!'

Ruth enjoyed the teaching aspect of her academic career. However, she was disappointed at the lack of promotion prospects. She noted that there were 'times when I thought well why the hell are you doing this amount of effort when I could readily have got away with a lot less'. She believed

that the College failed to recognise effort but quickly added that she saw the contradiction in this claim as she had been promoted. However, further promotion efforts were denied her and ultimately she left Bendigo College for another institution after being denied promotion while others less qualified gained advancement.

Pamela

Prior to working at Bendigo College Pamela had been employed as a computer programmer. Before this she had taught at a secondary school for a short time. She had completed a Bachelor of Arts degree but had no formal teaching or computing qualifications. While enjoying computer programming Pamela was bored with commercial programming work. She wanted to teach adults and desired any sort of teaching position in the computer industry. When a lecturing position at the College in Bendigo was advertised she successfully applied for it. Believing she had no hope of obtaining it she was incredibly surprised at her success.

A very strong attraction of the lecturing position at Bendigo was its rural location, for Pamela had always desired to live in rural Australia. At this time a career in the computer industry was virtually impossible if one lived in the country. Consequently securing a job involving computing, teaching and life in the country was very attractive.

Pamela observed that Bendigo College was eager to employ someone who knew anything about the programming language Cobol. She noted that 'because I could write Cobol programmes, they'd have gobbled me up at the time. Remember this was in 1970 years ago. Things were very, very different from what they are now'. While she was not formally qualified in computing or teaching her employment experience compensated for this deficiency. The College found qualified and experienced computing staff extremely hard to recruit. In addition Pamela noted that at this time interest in formal qualifications on the part of Bendigo College was very minimal.

When Pamela commenced lecturing at Bendigo her weekly teaching allocation was twenty hours of classes. This included three night classes. She was also required to run tutorials 'for a guy who would not give me any support at all—he would not even tell me at the start of the day what I was supposed to do'. She recalled that this meant that she 'was in a bit of a panic about it and got very little support'.

Pamela felt isolated in her work at Bendigo College as academic staff in Business Studies were responsible for very large student enrolments and consequently had very high workloads. Working in computing she and her colleagues also had to repeatedly master new computer systems

and rapidly changing technology. Consequently Pamela found it very difficult to remain abreast of current developments.

Suffering professional isolation Pamela found no one at Bendigo College that she wanted to emulate. There were a limited number of academics at the College that she could discuss professional concerns with. One colleague in particular was very good but she had not spoken to him much as he had a very heavy teaching load. If she had an urgent technical query there were one or two that she could seek assistance from.

Contemplating her future career had distressed Pamela. She noted that when 'I think I've got another twenty years here my heart sinks.' She was unable to think of alternative careers partly due to non-work commitments that included a farm and a desire to live in the country. Employment as a private consultant, while feasible, was not especially appealing. Her dissatisfaction was compounded because she enjoyed lecturing but a year's sabbatical leave in England had left her dissatisfied with many aspects of College life. She had wondered if a year spent working in industry would raise her morale.

Her sabbatical had been disappointing because the higher degree programme in computer systems that she enrolled in was both poorly taught and organised. The people in charge were very disorganised and incompetent. She was intensely annoyed by this as it was a wasted opportunity and she could not repeat it. She noted 'it could have been so much better'.

Conclusion

This article was stimulated by Friedman's call for university historians to undertake fine-grained, contextual studies of particular institutions and particular time periods. The article utilized MacKinnon's notion of micro-studies to investigate a group of female academics who worked in a non-elite or 'ordinary', but long established Australian College of Advanced Education, during a period that encompassed both rapid growth and drastic curtailment.

The edited life histories of Margaret, Clara, Merrill, Ruth and Pamela illustrate in fine grain detail aspects that large-scale studies of academic life during the period 1965-1985 sketched. These female academics constituted part of an overall small minority of academic staff at Bendigo College. For these female academics the choice of an academic career at Bendigo was simply fortuitous. Working conditions for women at the College were not so attractive that women were especially keen to apply or were actively recruited by the College. They had to teach large classes, work long hours and cover a large number of different classes. College and academic life was certainly not easy. The above is however, an incomplete

picture as some of these female staff such as Clara and Merrill were supported and encouraged by their colleagues (including males) and Merrill especially found the director and deputy director (both males) of the College especially helpful in the pursuit of her academic career.

This study has raised a number of issues that deserve further investigation. Firstly does the experience of these female academics hold true for the majority of females across the majority of disciplines who were employed at Bendigo College during the period in question? Secondly what was the experience of females who worked at other Australian higher education institutions during the period in question? Thirdly how do the employment experiences of these women academics compare to their male counterparts at this College and other higher education institutions? Fourthly was gender the key issue in the experience of academic life or are issues of geography (namely rural/city location of institution) and institutional type (ordinary or elite institution) more important in explaining experiences of academic life during this time?

NOTES

1. R. Friedman, *Integration and Visibility: Historiographic Challenges to University History* (Oslo: Forum for University History, 2000), p.1.
2. *Ibid.*, p.20.
3. *Ibid.*, p.20.
4. *Ibid.*, p.20.
5. *Ibid.*, p.22.
6. *Ibid.*, p.22.
7. A. Mackinnon, 'Shaking the foundations: on the (im) possibility of writing a history of women in higher education', *History of Education Review*, 28, 1 (1999), p.1.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
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